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ABSTRACT

Violent individuals are a heterogeneous group, making it unrealistic to think that a single psychological profile can classify them. Adolescents (N=72) at the Michigan Center for Forensic Psychiatry who had committed homicides were studied in an effort to distinguish clinically meaningful subtypes based on the motives and circumstance of their violent crimes. Subjects were divided into three groups: (1) psychotics; (2) nonpsychotics who had committed homicide in the course of another crime (crime group); and (3) nonpsychotics who had committed homicide in course of an interpersonal conflict with the victim (conflict group). Subgroups were compared to one another and to delinquent controls (N=35), using measures of prior adjustment and developmental background and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The MMPI results suggest that the crime group was substantially more disturbed than the conflict group, with the crime group mean MMPI profile suggesting higher levels of general distress and alienation; poor insight; and tendencies to somaticize, externalize, and deny responsibility. While the conflict group appeared generally less disturbed than the crime group, almost all individual MMPI profiles contained one or more elevated scales. These findings suggest that it is important to distinguish among subtypes of violent juveniles, and that there are differences between youths who commit crime- and conflict-related homicides both in the circumstances of the offense and in their prior adjustment. (NB)

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MMPI Profiles of Adolescents Charged with Homicide

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MMPI Profiles of Adolescents Charged with Homicide

Nearly 20 years ago Edwin Megargee (1970) reviewed the literature on the ability of psychological tests to predict violence. He concluded that no psychological test will postdict, much less predict, violent behavior. In recent years, similar studies have continued to obtain largely negative results (Monahan, 1980), leading to the frequently heard conclusion that "clinicians cannot predict dangerousness." A number of factors may account for our poor results to date. Among them are the statistical problems of predicting a low base-rate behavior and the inability to take into account situational factors that elicit violent behavior.

Another factor is the global concept of violence itself, which encompasses a wide variety of behaviors that may be exhibited for different reasons by different individuals. As clinicians who work with violent individuals know, they are a heterogeneous group and it may be unrealistic to suppose that a single psychological profile or constellation of predictor variables will suffice. Megargee and colleagues (Megargee, Cook, & Mendelsohn, 1967) demonstrated the importance of making distinctions among different types of violent individuals with the development of the Over-controlled Hostility Scale.

In our work with adolescents who have committed homicide we began with the idea of distinguishing clinically meaningful subtypes based on the motives and circumstances of their violent crime. We then hoped to validate the typology by comparing subgroups to one

another and to delinquent controls, using measures of prior adjustment and developmental background, and with the MMPI.

METHOD AND RESULTS

Our sample consisted of adolescents ages 12 to 18 who were charged with murder and referred by the courts for pre-trial evaluation at the Michigan Center for Forensic Psychiatry. We reviewed records on all cases referred from across the State of Michigan between 1977 and 1985. There were 88 such referrals, but 16 were omitted due to incomplete or missing clinical records, leaving a sample of 72 adolescents. In addition, we selected a control group of 35 adolescents who were referred for evaluation charged with non-violent crimes of larceny - auto theft or breaking and entering.

I want to begin by reviewing the typology and some of our early findings on the background characteristics of these youth (Cornell, Benedek, & Benedek, 1987). Then I will turn to the MMPI data on a subset of this sample.

We hypothesized that there were at least 3 distinct subgroups of juvenile murderers. First we identified all of the adolescents who were psychotic at the time of the homicide. Next, we subdivided the nonpsychotic adolescents into two groups: those who committed homicide in the course of another crime, such as a robbery or rape, and those who committed homicide in course of an interpersonal conflict or dispute with the victim. The first slide describes the breakdown of cases across these 3 groups. To our surprise, there were very few psychotic adolescents:

SLIDE 1

(sample size of three homicide groups)

Because of the small number of psychotic cases, I want to concentrate on the crime and conflict groups. First of all, although adolescents in both groups were charged with murder, the circumstances of their violent behavior were quite different.

SLIDE 2

(Victim relationship)

SLIDE 3

(Accomplice involved)

SLIDE 4

(Weapon used)

SLIDE 5

(Intoxication)

What is more important than that these adolescents differ in the kinds of homicides they committed is that there are developmental differences as well. We were interested in assessing what kinds of adjustment problems these adolescents had prior to the homicide. Were there different risk factors for different types of violent youth?

We had coders blind to any information about the offense review clinical records on each adolescent and assess their prior adjustment in 8 different areas. I will just summarize the 4 areas which significantly distinguished the crime and conflict groups.

SLIDE 6

(Differences between conflict and crime groups)

Approximately 70% of the adolescents completed the MMPI in the course of their pre-trial evaluation. This reduced our sample size in the following way.

SLIDE 7

We eliminated profiles with more than 30 missing items or TR indices greater than 5. High F scores are known to be associated with severe delinquency (Archer, 1984; Marks, Seemon, & Haller, 1974), so we did not exclude profiles on the basis of high F's. We anticipated that this sample would obtain unusually high F's, not only because of their status as delinquents, but because of their substantial level of distress in being incarcerated and charged with murder. We used T-scores based on the Marks, Seemon, & Haller adolescent norms.

First we compared the combined group of all homicide subjects with the larceny control subjects. As others have found, there were no differences between violent and nonviolent subjects.

SLIDE 8

However, once again, it is important to distinguish between different types of violent adolescents. When we subdivided the homicide cases into crime and conflict groups, significant differences did emerge. The overall profile analysis was significant, $F(1,34) = 5.24$, $p<.05$.

SLIDE 9

In follow-up to the multivariate analysis, we conducted t-tests on each scale. Here are the mean scores and significant differences.

SLIDE 10

As you can see, there are significant differences on scales F, 1, 3,

and 8.

The overall impression from these results is that crime group adolescents are substantially more disturbed than conflict group youth, although not on scales such as 4, 6, and 9, which one might associate with hostile acting out. The crime group mean profile suggests higher levels of general distress and alienation, but also probably poor insight and tendencies to somaticize, externalize, and deny responsibility.

One other factor which may play a role in these results could be a greater tendency among the crime youth to exaggerate or malinger psychopathology, as reflected in the very high F's for this group. Therefore, we looked at Obvious and Subtle scores for scales 2,3,4,6, and 9. (Unfortunately scores were available for only 10 crime and 12 conflict group youth.) There were no significant differences between crime and conflict groups (by individual t-tests) on any of the Obvious scores. Only one of the Subtle score comparisons was significant. Crime group youth were significantly higher on Subtle Scale 6, $t = 3.00$, $p<.01$ There were no significant differences between groups on any of the Obvious-Subtle difference scores, either.

Finally, we did review the high F's in the crime group and decided to eliminate the two most extreme cases which presented raw F's of 41 and 53, and T scores above 70 on 9 of 10 clinical scales. When we repeated the comparison between crime and conflict groups, there were still significant differences on scales F, 1, and 3, but the previously significant difference on scale 8 dropped to a non-

significant level.

It is misleading to rely simply on mean profiles. While none of the means were above 70 in the conflict group, almost all subjects had one or more elevated scales. However, there was considerable diversity among the profiles. No two-point code type occurred more than twice in any of the groups. The next slide presents the number of subjects who had elevations above 70 on each scale.

SLIDE 11

This information is partially overlapping with the data contained in the last slide. As you can see, the crime group was somewhat more likely to present elevations on scales such as 1, 3, and 8, but this is not to say there are not conflict group subjects with elevations on the same scales.

We anticipated that the distinction between crime and conflict group youth might parallel Megargee's distinction between over-controlled and under-controlled hostility. OH scores were available for 15 youth in the crime group and 13 in the conflict group. (It should be noted that 22 of these scores were pro-rated on 20 of 31 items because youth completed 399 MMPI's). However, there was no significant difference between the groups on the OH Scale.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we believe that it is important to distinguish among subtypes of violent juveniles. There are differences between youths who commit crime- and conflict-related homicides both in the circumstances of the offense and in their prior adjustment. When we examine MMPI profiles for these groups, the crime group presents a much more elevated mean profile, particularly on scales F, 1, 3, and 8. Several factors may contribute to profile differences. Crime group youth may represent a much more disturbed group, with poor insight and tendencies to deny, externalize, or somaticize their problems. They may be more likely to exaggerate their presentation, but if so, these differences were not reflected on Obvious-Subtle scales. The conflict group appears generally less disturbed, although almost all individual profiles contained one or more elevated scales.

Additional results and methodological information are available from the first author. Address: Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Virginia, 144 Ruffner Hall, 405 Emmet Street, Charlottesville, VA 22903

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SUMMARY OF SLIDES

SAMPLE GROUPS

PSYCHOTIC	- delusions or hallucinations at offense	5
CRIME	- associated with robbery, rape, etc.	37
CONFLICT	- interpersonal dispute with victim	30
	JUVENILE HOMICIDE TOTAL	**72**
LARCENY CONTROLS	- auto theft or breaking and entering	35
	SAMPLE TOTAL	**107**

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE OFFENSE

	Crime Group (n=37)	Conflict Group (n=30)	Psychotic Group (n=5)*
Victim Relationship			
Family member	1 (3%)	13 (43%)	1
Familiar person	15 (41%)	15 (50%)	2
Stranger	21 (57%)	2 (07%)	2
Weapon Used			
None	13 (35%)	2 (07%)	1
Gun	9 (24%)	14 (47%)	1
Knife	7 (19%)	8 (27%)	3
Club/other	8 (22%)	6 (20%)	0
Intoxication			
Alcohol/Drugs	27 (73%)**	9 (30%)	2
None reported	9 (24%)	21 (70%)	3
Accomplice Present			
Yes	21 (57%)	4 (13%)	0
No	16 (43%)	26 (87%)	5

Note: *Due to small sample size, percentages not presented.

**In one case, information missing on question of intoxication.

PRIOR ADJUSTMENT OF CRIME AND CONFLICT GROUPS

COMPOSITE CATEGORY	SELECTED ITEMS
	Crime group more likely to have...
School Problems***	Dropped-out of school
	Failed a grade or have failing grades
	Been truant from school
Substance Abuse*	Alcohol abuse
	Drug abuse
	Started use in early or pre-teens
Criminal Activity*	Committed Breaking and Entering
	Been placed in a juvenile facility
Stressful Events***	Fewer recent stressful events

* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$

MMPI SAMPLE

	CRIME	CONFLICT	CONTROL
Number administered MMPI	21/30	29/37	23/35
Missing items > 30	1	1	0
TR index > 5	2	10	5
Total MMPI'S for analysis	**18**	**18**	**18**

MMPI GROUP MEANS

	CRIME (18)	CONFLICT (18)	LARCENY (18)
LIE	50	51	50
F*	95	70	76
K	50	47	44
1*	75	59	64
2	75	64	65
3*	71	61	61
4	83	74	74
5	61	64	62
6	81	72	70
7	82	70	67
8*	103	77	71
9	74	68	64
0	61	59	56

* t-test comparing crime and conflict groups significant, $p < .05$